

A
L E T T E R

TO THE

First Belfast Company of Volunteers,

IN THE

PROVINCE OF ULSTER.



COX-HEATH, 1782.

LETTER

THE B. & O. COMPANY OF VIRGINIA

PROPOSED

A

L E T T E R, &c.

G E N T L E M E N,

I DID not see till lately the address from the first Belfast company of volunteers to the other corps of the province of Ulster, or I should have taken an earlier occasion of attending to so interesting a publication, in which some notice has been taken of my public conduct in the late questions concerning the constitution and commerce of Ireland. I believe it is unnecessary for me to say, that my anxious endeavours have never been wanting to promote the great objects of your address; and I have beheld, with great satisfaction, the gradual progress of public opinion in their favor. When some years ago,

B

in

in conjunction with your respectable countryman Lord Nugent, I introduced a bill for a partial emancipation of the commerce of Ireland. I soon perceived, from the numerous difficulties we had to encounter, that arguments drawn from the nature of trade, the authorities of the best writers, as well as the practice of the most enlightened nations, were insufficient to the great purpose we had in view, unless Ireland, by a vigorous exertion, did justice to herself, and by doing so, added wealth and power to the British empire at large. I saw the exertion made—the consequences were such as every man knew they must be.—We heard no more of addresses to cramp the industry and restrain the commerce of a sister kingdom; the parliament of Great Britain restored to its free agency, and consulting its own wisdom, and not the prejudices of a part of its constituents, by one liberal and comprehensive act, admitted Ireland to a participation of every commercial privilege, it remained in our power to offer you. Perhaps in some of the regulations consequent to this change of system, Ireland may have reason to complain. I enter not into the detail, I speak only of the principle of equality which was the professed basis of those regulations. When this great measure had taken place, I was often asked, by persons unconnected with your kingdom,

kingdom. Will not Ireland be satisfied now ? Shall we hear still of Irish grievances ? My answer was such, as the reason of the thing, and your declarations suggested to me, “ That the concession made by one parliament might be retracted by another ; that no merchant would embark his property on such a precarious security ; that a free trade was illusory, unless secured by a free constitution.” When I recur to the history of this memorable transaction, I beg not to be understood, that the minister, through whose hands it principally passed, appears to me blamable for not gratifying by the same act every wish and pretension of Ireland. I voted against him in several Irish questions, but I could not but be sensible that he had a very difficult task to execute ; that he was bound to attend to the temper, and accommodate himself to the feelings of both countries, and guard against a collision between them. Had he attempted four years ago to do more, he might perhaps have been disappointed in his attempt, and involved the peace of both countries in the consequences of that disappointment. Whoever judges of the minister of a free country in very critical conjunctures, without a reference to the opinions of the day on which he is called upon to act, will often condemn him without reason ; and I will venture to add,
that

that if you compare the late minister's conduct respecting Ireland with that of any of his predecessors, since the days of king William, you will, I think, admit, that instead of deserving blame, for not doing more in favor of Ireland, he is entitled to your good opinion for laying the foundation, on which, I trust, a sure fabric of public liberty and future opulence will be erected. I do not make this observation to gratify my private feelings, but to inculcate this practical truth on your minds, that whatever you have obtained, you owe to your own virtuous endeavours; that while your objects are, as they have hitherto been, founded in justice, and in the constitution, you cannot fail of success; and that your only danger is from the adoption of a belief, that all is already obtained which you want for yourselves and your posterity. In mentioning the recent transaction which makes the subject of your address, I beg to premise, that I speak with the utmost deference to the judgments of those who differ with me in opinion; I look up to many of them as ornaments to their country and to human nature, but we live under a government where public questions may be freely discussed; I neither assert nor think, that Ireland has been betrayed; but my conviction tells me, that she deceives herself, if she supposes her liberties

berties are yet built on a sure and immoveable foundation ; or that the best security has been given for the future enjoyment of them, which the nature of the case, and the circumstances of the present time, enable you to obtain. A minute review of the transaction, will corroborate the sentiments you have promulged in your address. I never remember any matter more eagerly expected, since I have sat in parliament, than the opening of Mr. Fox's plan to appease the discontents of Ireland ; to me, who knew particularly the anxious state of the public mind, every day's delay appeared a circumstance of danger, but delay was my only apprehension. The parliament of Ireland had wisely put itself at the head of an armed community, to obtain a recognition of the rights which belonged to it, and I knew that the parliament of Great Britain was too prudent, under such circumstances, to decline acceding to it. That the concessions Mr. Fox proposed to the House of Commons, were unclogged by any species of condition ; that instead of attempting to negotiate and make a bargain, he placed an implicit reliance on your generosity, is a proof, that he knew the temper of a free people ; and I gave my humble tribute of thanks to him, and to his colleagues, for their manly conduct. How then has it happened, that so fair a prospect has been darkened,

darkened, and that public discontents again begin to prevail? It required no prophetic spirit to foretel that it could not be otherwise. You know very well, that when Mr. Fox proposed a resolution for a repeal of the declaratory act, he accompanied it with another, stating, in the first part, an undoubted truism, under a stipulation of equal trade and equal liberty, "That the interests of the two kingdoms are inseparable;" in the second part, "That their connection ought to be founded on a solid and permanent basis." What possible interpretation could be put upon these words, but that further measures were intended to be taken to ascertain the political relation of the two countries to each other. Ireland had done her part, she had stated the extent of her expectations, she had declared her determination to abide at all events by the fate of a sister kingdom, if her legislative independence was admitted; and no minister could be wild enough to suppose, that her parliament would, almost at the same instant that she asserted her rights without reserve, admit that in any possible case Great Britain should legislate for her. When I talk of possible cases, I always mean to except the power to regulate the succession to the crown, which is the only instance I know of, in which a power of controlling every part of the British dominions,

minions, is and ought for ever to remain in the British parliament; but this is effectually provided for by the Irish act, declaring the perpetual annexation of the crowns of both kingdoms to each other. However these words may since have been cavilled at; the intention of them at the time was undoubtedly this, that Great Britain would secure by acts of her own the liberties of Ireland, and in the mean time would prove her sincerity by repealing the 6th of George I. If the repeal then only has taken place, and no further measures are pursued to secure the connexion on a solid and permanent basis, is it not a confession on the part of this country, that the ministers have left the great work of settlement incomplete, and that the doctrine contained in your address is founded in truth, and a regard to the joint interests of both kingdoms? Unconnected as I was with the ministers of the day, but anxious to co-operate with them in their Irish measures, I observed to the House, that “ unless the repeal of
“ the declaratory act was attended by an express
“ renunciation of the right to bind Ireland by
“ British acts of parliament, I knew that Ireland
“ would not be satisfied; that the bill of repeal
“ might be so framed as to answer this great object, but that unless the reasons for originally
“ passing it were disclaimed in the preamble, or
“ that

“ that enacting words were introduced into the
 “ body of the bill, which might bind the faith
 “ and honor of all future parliaments, it could
 “ not but be received by the Irish nation as an
 “ half-measure, as a concession owing to the cir-
 “ cumstances of the day, which might or might
 “ not be adhered to in future times; that while
 “ a long bead-roll of laws, purporting to bind
 “ Ireland, remained in our statute-book unre-
 “ pealed, it would leave the question of right on
 “ the worst possible issue between the two king-
 “ doms, each having constitutional arguments to
 “ resort to in favor of its respective preten-
 “ sions, and that doubtful claims had been in every
 “ age the curse of mankind. That the repeal
 “ proposed would only carry things back to the
 “ situation they were in before the 6th of George
 “ the First, at which period Great Britain was
 “ in full exercise of the power of binding Ireland;
 “ that no man could seriously think, that because
 “ the act “ for the better securing the dependence
 “ of Ireland” was at an end, that therefore, the
 “ dependence itself was at an end; or in other
 “ words, that by taking away the regulation, you
 “ take away the thing which was proposed to be
 “ regulated. That the angry act which passed
 “ some years ago, for annihilating the assembly
 “ of New York, in case of a non-compliance
 “ with

“ with the mutiny bill, might as well be argued
 “ to be the foundation of all British authority in
 “ America : as both statutes were of a similar
 “ sort, and were enacted for similar purposes, to
 “ produce submission to claims as old as the
 “ common law, and which could not be destroyed
 “ by implication. That the same motives which
 “ induced parties in a private transaction of im-
 “ portance to guard against ambiguity and litiga-
 “ tion, by reducing the agreement to writing,
 “ ought to prevail among nations. That the act
 “ of union with Scotland was a proof that na-
 “ tions may conclude on a certain footing : that
 “ the Scotch nation had secured its privileges by
 “ a legal, which is the only security, that nothing
 “ in that transaction was left to oral tradition to
 “ supply, or to the history of the times to ex-
 “ pound ; that the record spoke for itself, and no
 “ article of it ever had been or ever would be
 “ infringed, until honor and faith were banished
 “ from the globe, because the two nations know
 “ what they owe to each other, and the law is
 “ the common umpire between them. That I
 “ thought a country, circumstanced as Ireland
 “ is, inferior in strength, and dependent in so
 “ many circumstances on the councils of Great
 “ Britain, would not consent to hold, on a
 “ mere constructive security, the enjoyment of
 “ every

“ every thing that is dear to her ; that I con-
 “ sidered the omission of Ireland in the marine
 “ mutiny bill, to which the house had agreed
 “ with a single dissenting voice on a motion from
 “ me but a few weeks before (though no Irish
 “ law at that time existed for the government of
 “ the many recruits which are raised in Ireland
 “ for the marines) as a sure indication of the
 “ willingness of parliament to abandon all inter-
 “ ference in the internal concerns of Ireland,
 “ that the great object after that to be provided
 “ for was, that the Irish merchant might in fu-
 “ ture navigate the high seas, wherever his own
 “ industry might lead him to the best market,
 “ unrestrained by any power which could be in-
 “ terested in checking his prosperity, and subject
 “ only to the necessary restriction of not holding
 “ intercourse with the enemies of his sovereign ;
 “ that the simple repeal of a bullying statute,
 “ which originated in a conflict about the judi-
 “ cature of Ireland, was at best a very awkward, if
 “ not inadequate mode of settling the controversy
 “ about the independence of her legislature.”

As this argument, which I happened to be the
 first person who started in either kingdom, has
 since been most ably enlarged upon by Mr. Flood,
 I am ashamed to detain you by repeating any part
 of

of it: the force of it, however ill expressed by me, was abundantly felt; several members expressed their acquiescence in it; and Mr. Fox declared, that as giving satisfaction to Ireland was the great object he had in view, he should so frame the bill as to answer that desirable purpose. You remember, Gentlemen, that much time elapsed between the agreement of the House of Commons to the two resolutions, and the production of the bill of repeal. The world naturally supposed, that the interval was employed in consulting the first lawyers of both kingdoms, and that an act of final settlement would arise out of so much consultation and correspondence. You may judge therefore of my surprise, and that of many others, when we found that such expectations had been raised to so little purpose, and that the ministerial plan consisted of a simple repeal of the declaratory act. A surprise which nothing could heighten but the answer I received from persons in the highest authority, to a proposal I made of amending it in the manner I have described. “Ireland does
 “not wish it—Ireland is satisfied with the bill in
 “its present form: we are so assured by those
 “who stand highest in the confidence of the
 “nation, with whom the Irish administration is
 “in the habit of consulting.” To such information I thought myself bound to submit. I know
 there

there are persons in Ireland who ridicule the idea of a renunciation by Great Britain, and who ask with a pride, I think much misplaced, “ shall Ireland owe any part of her constitutional security to an English act of parliament? If she does, the same power which gives may remove. If she calls for a renunciation of any authority, she indirectly admits its existence.” As to the former question, I have no doubt of answering, yes; if the bill is *bona fide*, what it professes to be. If indeed the preamble stated the rightful claim of Great Britain to bind you, such a bill would be inadmissible, even although in the enacting part, the exercise of it was renounced, because if grounded on expediency, although apparently relinquished, it might be considered as a fresh declaration of the right; or if the renunciation was confined to any particular part or subject of legislation, as for instance, to the internal concerns of Ireland, it might be construed unfavourably to the freedom of your navigation, because omitted in the act. But if the provision is general, and the language in which it is expressed is unambiguous, it must be a complete security, as no nation could think of reviving a claim, of which, by so solemn an act of her own, she had divested herself. As to the latter question, such a sophism cannot, I think, have imposed upon
any

any man. There is a clear distinction in the nature of things, between rights and claims, which has marked in all ages the conduct of nations towards each other, as well as of subjects at many memorable periods towards the governments under which they lived. You may safely admit, that Great Britain has long claimed a right to bind you by her laws, because that is only the admission of an historical fact, and does not imply that she had a particle of just right. The king of Prussia, in every transaction with the House of Austria, demands a confirmation of the original cession of Silesia to his family; Can such a demand be tortured into an admission on his part, that Austria has a right to re-enter upon that antient part of her dominions? If that reasoning is just, Magna Charta was a prerogative measure, and the barons who called upon king John to do them justice in the field, by that call admitted all his usurpations to be legal. How much would their plain sense have revolted against such a fallacy? Their object was rational and wise; they wished to maintain their loyalty to their king, but they wished also to maintain their own liberties: they knew that both king and people are equally unhappy. *ubi jus est vagum et incognitum*, that the limits of power ought to be permanently fixed; that subjects ought equally to know what they

owe

owe to the sovereign, and the sovereign what he owes to his subjects. The case of confederated nations under a common sovereign, calls equally for plain and immoveable landmarks of law. Who can contemplate the unhappy war in which we are at present involved with the colonies, without perceiving that it arose from the undefined and unexplained nature of their governments? That if such an happy occasion of temperately adjusting our respective pretensions had arisen between Great Britain and America, as the present moment offers to Great Britain and Ireland, an ocean of kindred blood had been saved: but the history of this war furnishes us with an exact precedent of what ought to be done. The parliament of Great Britain did, in express terms, for ever abandon all right to tax America: I do not recollect, that the competency of parliament to pass such an act was called in question, though some objected to the policy of it: but no man will seriously contend, that if peace had taken place with the colonies, on the foundation of that statute, any American would have apprehended a future exercise of the power of taxing; though it is within the compass of possibility, that one parliament may revoke the measures of another. Admitting that possibility to have weight, does it follow, that because you cannot guard against every

every

every possible contingency, that you should not take every precaution which human prudence can suggest? In short, if an express and direct security was to be given to America, against the encroachments of a power which she dreaded, why was a constructive one deemed sufficient for Ireland? Were the difference not founded in reason and in law, but existed only in the imaginations of men, a wise government ought carefully to avoid it; for that policy must be fatal to society, which furnishes a pretence to suppose that in proportion as the subject is orderly in his deportment, obedient to the laws, and loyal to his sovereign, his rights are to be considered as doubtful, and the tenure of his liberty becomes insecure. I perceive a disposition to judge severely of the motives of every man who presumes to think or to say, that any part of this transaction has been unwise or equivocal; and the generous feelings of the Irish nation, not their sound sense, is appealed to, to resist any further attempt to clear up the terms under which they and their posterity are to remain in future connected with Great Britain. If the subject was not of the utmost moment, if it was not equally the interest of both kingdoms to settle the controversy on such grounds that no rash minister may hereafter venture to revive it, I should

B think,

think I did the office of a bad citizen even in expressing these sentiments to you : but the people of Ireland are not now to learn, that antient claims are reluctantly parted with by any people; that the parliament of Great Britain has immemorially exercised the right of binding Ireland by laws, and that your ancestors have acquiesced under and submitted to those laws: they are not now to learn, that the councils of every government are fluctuating and uncertain, but that the love of power is a feature which distinguishes them at all times. If they want an instance, they cannot but recollect, that the same British parliament which repealed the stamp act, imposed three years afterwards a tea act, which could never have happened, if indirect and constructive promises were held in the same sacred light as positive and specific engagements: but politicians, who will try to evade the one, are not so daring as to violate the other. That ~~no~~ such attempt as I now allude to will be made under the present circumstances, or perhaps in the present age, while the strength of Ireland is equal to her spirit, and the particulars which distinguished the history of last winter, are fresh in every man's memory, I most readily admit; but he must have read history with very little attention, who will venture to assert, or who will advise his country to act
upon

upon the assertion, that such a case is impossible ever to happen. Your island has made a wonderful effort in arming and disciplining a whole people, but you have had two strong and equally honourable motives for doing so; you had your coast to defend against a foreign enemy, and a constitution to secure against a foreign jurisdiction. A peace will naturally remove the first of these apprehensions, and when the bulk of the nation is persuaded that the independency of your legislature is placed beyond the reach of violence or of seduction, it is in the natural course of things, that the military associations, to which you owe so much, will insensibly decline. Peace too, by reducing the interest of money, will enable the Irish merchants to borrow, and avail themselves of that free commerce, by which, from the adverse circumstances of the last three years, you scarcely perceive yourselves to be benefitted. The encrease of a commercial, always operates to the abatement of the military spirit of a country: as labour rises in value, the sacrifice of time, which the keeping up of military habits requires, will be much enhanced; and if any plan like that of the English militia shall be adopted, the bulk of the people will insensibly begin to think, that to them the business of arms exclusively belongs. The public spirit of Ireland may perhaps retard,

but cannot prevent the operation of that jealousy, which the difference of a militia paid by, and a militia gratuitously serving the public, will occasion : and you cannot be ignorant, that those weak men among us, who see matter of alarm in the extent and spirit of your associations, have uniformly wished, by raising one armed body against another, to separate the national force which they could not break. You who live on the spot, are the best judges whether any such consequences are likely to arise for some time ; but I see enough to convince me, that such a thing may happen. If then, on one hand, I may suppose the national force of Ireland may decline, on the other hand it may be presumed, that Great Britain, by rigid œconomy. and accommodating her conduct in every respect to her circumstances, may, after a few years peace, recover a great proportion of her strength. To her commerce alone she must look, as the foundation of both revenue and navy ; and being for the first time deprived of several branches she formerly enjoyed, she will naturally watch those which remain in her power with a more sharp-sighted jealousy than ever. Perhaps the fears formerly expressed of a free trade to Ireland, may in some instances prove true at the period which I suppose, and a preference be given at a foreign market

market to some articles of Irish manufacture. Instead of exerting himself to recover the ground he has lost by improving the quality of his goods, we know a merchant's first idea is to apply for a prohibition and a monopoly. What reception will the minister of Great Britain give to such an application? Were Scotland the object of jealousy to the English merchant, the minister would tell him to look into the articles of Union, which had expressly bound up the question between the nations for ever. Has Ireland such a fixed constitution to boast of? In what page of the statute-book of either kingdom is it to be found? Have you enabled the British minister to point out to the merchant, that the thing he applies for is impossible? The merchant will naturally say, "that he knows of many English laws which are yet in force against Ireland, because he never heard that an act of parliament could be got rid of but by an actual repeal: that as these restrictions operated before the declaratory act was in being, they must have equal authority after it is expunged and forgotten: that he knows at the time of the repeal, it was not considered as a renunciation of the right in either kingdom." He will produce the declarations of ministers, who at the very moment of proposing the measure, held up the necessity of one controlling

controlling authority thro' the whole empire ; he will say also, " that the Irish legislature, having " these speeches in their hands, yet admitted that " a repeal was sufficient without a renunciation : " that although particular bodies of men had " thanked Mr. Flood for his advice, no step was " taken in consequence of it ; and that the bulk " of the nation, though they found they had not " obtained that constitution which they considered " as their birthright, yet disclaimed any further " call on the justice of Great Britain."

Perhaps in addition to these arguments, drawn from history and from law, it may be suggested to the minister, that the experiment may safely be tried ; that if he uses general words in applying the restraint, he may afterwards declare that Ireland is or is not comprehended, according to the event ; If the Irish nation, abating as she grows richer in her eagerness for liberty, and unwilling to risque a contest with a kingdom to which she is so closely allied, acquiesces for a moment, the boasted acquisitions of 1782 are at one stroke annihilated ; one precedent lays the groundwork of another, and the trade of Ireland again will be trampled upon by every combination of petty traders, who fancy they see their own advantage in her humiliation. If, on the contrary, her spirit continues high ; if she claims her rights
in

in that firm but temperate language, which the consciousness of a good cause never fails to inspire; the minister who is unjust enough to make the attempt, will afterwards be so mean as to disclaim it; It will be called a clerical error, or the unmeaning jargon of the Custom-House; The apology may perhaps be accepted, and a further attempt against the rights of Ireland be adjourned till a more favourable occasion. Whoever sees no danger from the state of things which I have endeavoured to describe, must be a bolder man than I profess to be. He is much mistaken if he thinks that an encrease of weight thrown into the popular scale of Great Britain, will diminish the risque; The freest governments are always the most jealous of their dependencies; the respect they shew to the privileges of others, is not proportioned to the anxiety they profess for their own, and the more immediately we are connected with, and dependent on the people who elect us, the more liable we shall be to act under these impressions, which must ever be of a popular cast in a trading kingdom, unless guarded against by fixed barriers of law. But we are told, all this may possibly be true, but the honour of the Irish nation is committed: that it would ill become a parliament, who were parties to the transaction in question, to impeach their own act; that

that it would fully the national character, and hazard a rupture between the two kingdoms. If this is really your situation, far be it from me to address you in the language of congratulation; but I deny these assertions to be grounded. In the first place, your honor is bound to Great Britain in this sense, that being called upon to state all your demands, you ought not now to add to the number of them. I admit this to be true in its fullest extent, but the independency of your legislature was the *sine qua non* of your demand; and if by mismanagement, or any other cause, that is not fully secured, the objection does not apply. You do not demand any new concession, when you require that those of last winter may be more satisfactorily explained. In the next place, to suppose that the Lords and Commons of Ireland being pledged to their country to obtain a free constitution, could afterwards pledge themselves to Great Britain to accept of less; that, in other words, they could bind themselves to a simple repeal, when that repeal did not amount to a renunciation, is to suppose the grossest absurdity; because the demand of redress, implies the demand of every thing which is requisite to that redress. No man of honor can think a promise hastily made to one man, can vacate a solemn engagement previously entered into with another.

No body of men ever was so circumstanced, as the parliament of Ireland is contended to be at this moment ; that from a punctilio of honor to Great Britain, it is their duty to overlook what they owe to the people of Ireland. I do not impute such a sentiment to any individual, in either of those respectable assemblies for which I profess the greatest veneration, and whose oversight, as it appears to me, I sincerely lament, but cannot attribute to any bad motive. I only state the absurd consequence to which the argument immediately leads, that Ireland not having obtained the object of her requisition, is yet precluded from any further means of attaining it. Your address has, I think, shewn from the proceedings, that literally and in point of fact, neither House did enter into any such rash stipulation: but I do not depend solely upon that ; I admit, for the sake of argument, that your parliament has made such a false step, Is the body of the nation bound to acquiesce under it ? Would every effort on their part to retrieve it be unconstitutional ? This appears to me one of the few cases in which the immediate interposition of the people is to be justified. The question is really this, Shall Ireland have a parliamentary constitution or not ? for that body is improperly called a parliament, whose deliberations are liable to be controlled

controlled by any authority upon earth. If in the beginning of this great business, while both Houses were sitting, you took the management of it upon yourselves, is there any motive of delicacy towards parliament, which hinders you from setting the last hand to it during a recess? If there is, I hope a speedy meeting of the Irish parliament will remove the difficulty. Many reasons, I should suppose, will make this measure necessary. The Irish suitor must feel an inequality in the administration of justice, if the House of Lords is not open every winter, as the British is, for the determination of appeals; and as the settlement of Irish estates can be regulated in future only by Irish acts, the circumstances of private families, and the necessary circulation of property, will require very frequent meetings of parliament, which is become in modern times a general court of conveyancing for the subject; but I apprehend also, that the late measure of adopting English laws into the statute-book of Ireland, not by particular enumeration, but by general description, cannot long remain exactly as it now is, as nothing but the urgency of the moment, and the necessity of securing private titles, could justify the sending the subjects of Ireland to read the English statutes, and search in them for the rule of their actions. Surely when a time for more delibera-
tion

tion is permitted, it will be thought better to pass distinctly and separately Irish laws with similar provisions. That the trade of the two kingdoms must be put in many, and perhaps most instances, on an equal footing, or the same foreign treaty which applies to the one will not be applicable to the other, I readily admit. But it is by no means a matter of indifference how this is done; for if you do it by reference to English statutes, and by a general provision, that such as confer equal benefits, and impose equal restraints, shall be in force in Ireland, you transfer the power of deciding how long they shall so continue, with regard to yourselves, from your own legislature to another. But when I am writing to a corps of Ulster volunteers, I cannot omit the critical situation of the linen trade, and my apprehensions of its decline, if it exists much longer, by connivance only, and without the sanction of law; as those who are concerned in it must feel, that the assurances of the linen board under which they at present act, are inadequate to their security, and that in a country governed by law, parliament alone is competent to give them complete relief. But if these reasons are not deemed sufficient, it appears to me that the late arrangements make annual sessions of your parliament indispensably necessary. While Great Britain exercised the
power

power of making laws for you, to grant money, and to regulate the internal police of the kingdom, were the only objects of deliberation to your parliament: from foreign politics you were totally excluded, your foreign trade was regulated by negociations on which you never were consulted, and of which you scarcely knew any thing; you were involved in the consequences of every war which Great Britain thought it her interest to undertake, but though you partook of every burthen, you never shared till a late period any of the advantages resulting from her success. How different is your situation now? For the first time you assume that rank and importance which belongs to you in the councils of the empire. Great Britain, deserted by every nation which she has successively loaded with obligations, finds in a neglected sister such resources, as a liberality of conduct towards her could alone draw forth, and which no foreign alliance could supply; while Ireland thinks herself repaid for every effort by the consideration, that the value of her friendship is properly understood, and that in every future question of war and of peace, of commerce and of politics, the sense of the Irish public will have its due weight. If this change of system appears to you as it does to me, a new æra of happiness to both kingdoms, how painful is the recollection,

recollection, that any thing should be wanting to secure an enjoyment of it.

Two measures have been proposed for this purpose ; the one by an Irish law, declaring that in case the king of Great Britain shall assent to an act of parliament purporting to bind Ireland, then and from thenceforward the law which annexes the crown of Ireland inseparably to that of England, shall *ipso facto* be repealed. The other, by obtaining an English law, to disclaim all legislative authority over Ireland. With respect to the former, I am far from combating the expediency of an Irish bill of rights ; such a measure, properly framed, may be of great advantage, but I cannot believe the Irish parliament will readily give it a sanction, which eventually separates the kingdoms, and impeaches the title of future kings, on a contingency taking place, owing perhaps to carelessness, and not to system ; to the ignorance of individuals, not to the politics of the body to which they belong ; yet in both cases the penalty would attach, because it is impossible to discriminate them in drawing the bill. It seems also not consistent with justice, to point your resentment at the monarch, for an offence committed against your rights by the deliberative parts of our constitution, in which he must be entirely passive
since

since the difuse of the royal negative. It is necessary also to take care, that in your attempts to guard against the interposition of Great Britain in Irish concerns, you may not do towards her what you justly inveigh against in your own case ; for an Irish law, prescribing to the British monarch in what manner he shall exercise his prerogative with respect to acts of the British legislature, will undoubtedly bear that construction. These are matters of intricate and nice speculation, which I hope never to hear discussed between the two kingdoms, because good will and good humour never can arise from the discussion. Allow me to add, that were the interests of Great Britain out of the question, nothing could be more dangerous to your internal peace, than to unsettle the minds of the people on the subject of their allegiance, by pointing out new and constructive cases of forfeiture in the crown. You well know that much mischief has arisen in former times, from the heat and violence to which similar doctrines gave occasion. When the death of princes, and other inevitable causes, produce such a state of things, it must be submitted to with resignation ; but to encourage it under authority of parliament, and in a case which does not require that particular sanction, will I think appear to you upon mature consideration improper. I sometimes see in print

congratulations

congratulations to Ireland, on the revolution of 1782, and the phrase is not ill chosen, as to a people eager for liberty, and mindful of their great deliverer, it recalls the memorable revolution of 1688. That transaction was original in its nature, it remains on the page of history a lesson to all future times, to respect the rights of the people. It rests on its own merits, and appeals to no former passage of history for its justification, but as it was above all law, so no law has attempted to recognise the principles by which it was brought about, or to define the cases in which allegiance shall cease to be a duty, and resistance become justifiable in the subject.

High as the pulse of the public beat for liberty after that memorable æra, and anxious as the nation was to prevent in future the mischiefs which they had so lately escaped, yet this mode of obtaining security was never resorted to. The parliament abolished the dangerous branches of the prerogative, which king James and his predecessors had abused; they reduced the theory of our constitution to such clear and fixed principles, that no sovereign could err in future but by design. But here they wisely stopt; if they never attempted defining the cases in which the crown should again be forfeited, I have a right to conclude, that they regarded the expedient as unnecessary or dangerous;

ous; *unnecessary*, because when the measure of oppression is full, the subject will seek his safety in resistance, whether invited to it by an act of parliament or not : *dangerous*, inasmuch as it furnishes pretences to revolt and disobedience, which the best governments in history have been shaken by, as well as the worst, and which never rise to so formidable an height as when coloured by some mistaken principle of the constitution.

If I err in the sentiments I have just offered, you will not think the error a very blamable one, into which I have been led by my regard to the principles of the revolution ; I have stated the more strongly my objections to the bill in question, or rather to the particular mode by which it was proposed to enforce it, because I should be sorry that your thoughts and attention were diverted from a measure which I think both safe and practicable to one, which perhaps you ought not to desire, and which you might be unable to attain. Besides, the idea of this bill is founded on a presumption, that Ireland has not sufficiently asserted her rights ; in that respect, it is impossible to add to what has been done. But the assertion of a party in his own cause, is not equal to the admission of his adversary : Ireland may for ever protest against the claim, but no renunciation of
it

it can be effectual which does not proceed from Great Britain ; this is the measure which I have at heart, because I know if Great Britain unequivocally speaks out, she will not at any future moment violate her engagement. I am confident men's minds were fully prepared for this very measure in the last session of parliament ; I am confident it would have been assented to, had the claim been made by those who had authority to do so in your behalf. If you are disappointed that it did not take place, do not attribute to want of sincerity in us what arose from inadvertency in some of you. Great Britain was as well disposed as one country can be, to gratify the wishes of another ; but it was too much to expect of her to give more to Ireland than Ireland seemed to require ; nor if you were satisfied with a weaker security for your liberties, was it her business to obtrude a more effectual one upon you. Depend upon it the error lay here. Great Britain being willing to concede the substance, never meant to dispute with you about the mode ; that was the business of the ministers to prepare, and parliament took it upon trust that they would not recommend any measure which should fail of giving compleat satisfaction ; for the universal desire of our House of Commons was, to close for ever the account with Ireland. If then per-

fect freedom was last year within your reach, why should it be less so now? In no material circumstance is the state of things altered; Great Britain still struggles against an host of enemies, sometimes with success, but always with honor, an object of greater admiration in her distress, than in the fullest career of her former victories. At home indeed another revolution has happened, and that administration is at an end whose power, whose abilities, and whose popularity, Mr. Flood supposed would give an advantage against Ireland in the discussion of a question of right. If a partial and imperfect satisfaction given to Ireland has produced the vote of a large army, and an addition of twenty thousand seamen to the navy, it must ensure the continuance of that policy in Great Britain, which in the outset has so fully answered her expectations. To talk of a civil war, as the possible consequence of the measure recommended in your address, is highly injurious to the British character. Do we accept with cordiality and gratitude your generous exertions for our relief, and because you require to be clearly and unequivocally free, can we harbour a wish to your prejudice? I will hazard my opinion very freely; whenever the ministers of Great Britain feel that it is the general sense of the people of Ireland, that a clear renunciation of her legislative authority should
take

take place, they will bring forward the necessary measures for that purpose. Great Britain cannot make a cheaper sacrifice, for she surrenders only a vexatious claim, which no honest minister will think himself warranted to act upon, and which no wise one will dare to employ. To you, on the contrary, it is every thing which makes existence a blessing, it involves your present interests, and those of your latest posterity; it comprehends equally the two great objects of property and personal liberty, and as far as any human arrangement can do so, it binds the two kingdoms for ever to each other by a firm compact to which each may appeal, and which never can be mistaken. With this security in your hands, could Lord Abingdon's bill produce the smallest ferment among you? but till you have attained it, anxiety and doubt must for ever prevail; every custom-house regulation will be an object of your jealousy, and every ministers words respecting Ireland, a matter of moment to your happiness. The people will not for ever bear so uneasy a state of suspense. The period of a general election is not very remote, they will then naturally enquire, what measures are wanting for their further security, and enforce those measures upon the new parliament; but that moment may perhaps not be so propitious as the important one you now

have in your power, and which fleets away unnoticed and unimproved. If there is one political prospect to which I look with peculiar pleasure, it is the rising greatness of a country to which I, and those who belong to me, have long been indebted for almost every advantage which they possess. I am aware, that scarcely an event can happen to blot and mar that flattering prospect but a conflict with Great Britain. Let no man, however he may slight my abilities, think so ill of my heart, as to suppose that I should not deprecate such a conflict as the greatest personal calamity. I solemnly declare, that the measure recommended in this letter, appears to me the surest method of guarding against it. My ardent wish is to preserve for ever the connexion of the two kingdoms, and to make them subservient to each other's prosperity; but I know that the only connexion which can be lasting between them is a connexion of freedom, a connexion of common interest, a connexion of mutual benefits, and not a connexion of power.

I have now done, and shall make no apology for the length of my letter, which I have obtruded on you unasked; the common interest which attaches us to the same cause, must be my excuse. I desire to lead no man's opinion, but I
have

have a right to declare my own. My conduct shall be implicitly directed by that which the Irish nation shall think fit to pursue : if she shall, upon mature reflection, determine to leave the great ^{question} ~~subject~~ of her rights ~~in~~ its present situation, my lips shall be closed on the subject for ever. If, on the contrary, the sentiments which you have declared shall spread, as I suspect they will, thro' every part of the kingdom ; if it shall become the universal sense to make one more, and I hope a final effort for a settlement with Great Britain, no zeal, no energy shall be wanting on my part to contribute to its success ; convinced, as I have long been, that by adhering to that line of conduct, I shall discharge the double duty which I owe to my sovereign and to my country.

